

My name is James Arria and I am an office coordinator for the West Haven Adult Day Care Center. I'm writing you to just make a point and express my disappointment over the recent fax that was sent to us regarding Governor Rell's mitigation plan.

While I do understand these tough economic times require some VERY tough decisions, I am dismayed at what seems to me the unnecessary and continuing practice of hurting the elderly and disabled in this state because of excessive poor spending by local, state, and the national government. Trends suggest that the aging population will only increase, and continuing to cut programs that will hurt the quality of life these people deserve to have will not solve the current fiscal crisis. It will only worsen it.

In my almost 8 years working here at the West Haven Adult Day Center I have come to see just how vital our services are, and to have a new and better understanding of what the elderly and disabled often go through.

I have seen with my own eyes the positive effect we have on so many lives with the services we provide. Clients who attend our center are normally so isolated, even with their families around to help them.

These people don't have a chance to get out of their homes and interact with others who could relate to them and their situation.

Most clients initially are hesitant to attend at first, but after a few weeks many of them can't wait to get here! When I see them go home in the afternoon they just look so much healthier, full of life. They laugh, tell stories, and we have gotten so many letters from families thanking us and telling us how our program made such a difference in someone's quality of life. It is a feeling of deep satisfaction that all of us have, and it makes all of the staff here, myself included feel like what we do really is important.

It is with considerable gall that I read about either the elimination or freezing of programs like the Alzheimer's Respite Program, Home Care Program, and cuts or increases to Medicaid, Medicare and so on. Again, while I understand some VERY tough decisions need to be made, and that this has not been easy, it bothers me that so many people who supposedly advocate for us can be so shortsighted and so unaware.

I have cerebral palsy myself, and through a lot of hard work and determination I have been able to defy the odds and prove to those who told my parents 34 years that I would be a 'burden' and a 'vegetable'.

Many times I have fought the urge to feel sorry for myself, to just quit. But my family and others would not let it happen. I graduated high school, attended and graduated college, learned to drive, and keep a job, and take care of myself. I do not need to be waited on, or coddled. I have never just accepted hand outs. Yet I still fight for inclusion and acceptance in society. I was involved as an athlete/coach with CT Special Olympics for 12 years. Yet it breaks my heart to see so many of my friends and former athletic colleagues struggle to keep a semblance of normal life.

The programs that allow them (and to a lesser extent myself) to live a normal life like everyone else are constantly being cut. So many suffer from limited social

interaction, or the inability to participate in certain things because of limited resources. People are being forced to live off social security or unemployment. The state claims to be in 'fiscal crisis', yet I see money still being spent as if it was never ending, for projects that NEVER see completion or for things pushed through because of special interest groups or politicians with agendas that benefit only the wealthy or influential.

My own life has been affected by these cuts...the constant fear that I will lose my job, which would be devastating. While I drive, my driving is limited due to previous accidents and safety concerns. My current job is perfect because I stay within West Haven, and do not have to battle the perils of this state's overcrowded highways. If I were to be laid off, the difficulty of finding other employment that would allow me to live a productive life would be in serious jeopardy, since my limited driving range and also having to still be wary of being discriminated against because of my handicap, even if I have the skills required to do the work.

Hurting programs like the ones I have mentioned will only hurt more than it will help. Families are already over burdened enough. I have seen some of our own clients have to lose their homes, or be forced early into long term care when they are still vital and fairly healthy, and then watch them deteriorate rapidly. I have seen their families and caregivers struggle to maintain their own lives and nearly go into bankruptcy because of continuing, spiraling health care costs. Yet Governor Rell is proposing cuts that would simply devastate a LARGE portion of the state's population, and THIS is the end all to the 'financial crisis'?

I should point out as well that we just received the information regarding these hearings yesterday, and I find it unbelievably ironic that because of a lack of consideration that we are unable to have someone such as our director be able to speak out at these hearings.

We're just supposed to be completely unaware and then wake up one morning and come to work and find out that our program could be gone and we didn't have the opportunity to voice our concerns?!

I'm not trying to accuse anyone of anything, I just am a concerned citizen who is so tired of political games and of a lack of accountability. I'm tired of seeing big corporations give themselves huge raises while the taxpayer pays for it.

You want to solve this budget crisis? Then DO NOT cut funding to programs like Adult Day Care, or other programs that will help an increasingly aging population. It's these people that helped build this country and they deserve to live their later years with peace of mind, not having to work until they day they die just so they can live.

Thank you.